Missing in Action

A true story of a sole survivor of a combat mission in the Southwest Pacific area during W.W.II

by Norman D. Smith

He reached down from on high
and took hold of me;
He drew me out of deep waters.
He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
from my foes,
who were too strong for me.

Psalm 18:16 - 17

High Flight

by John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

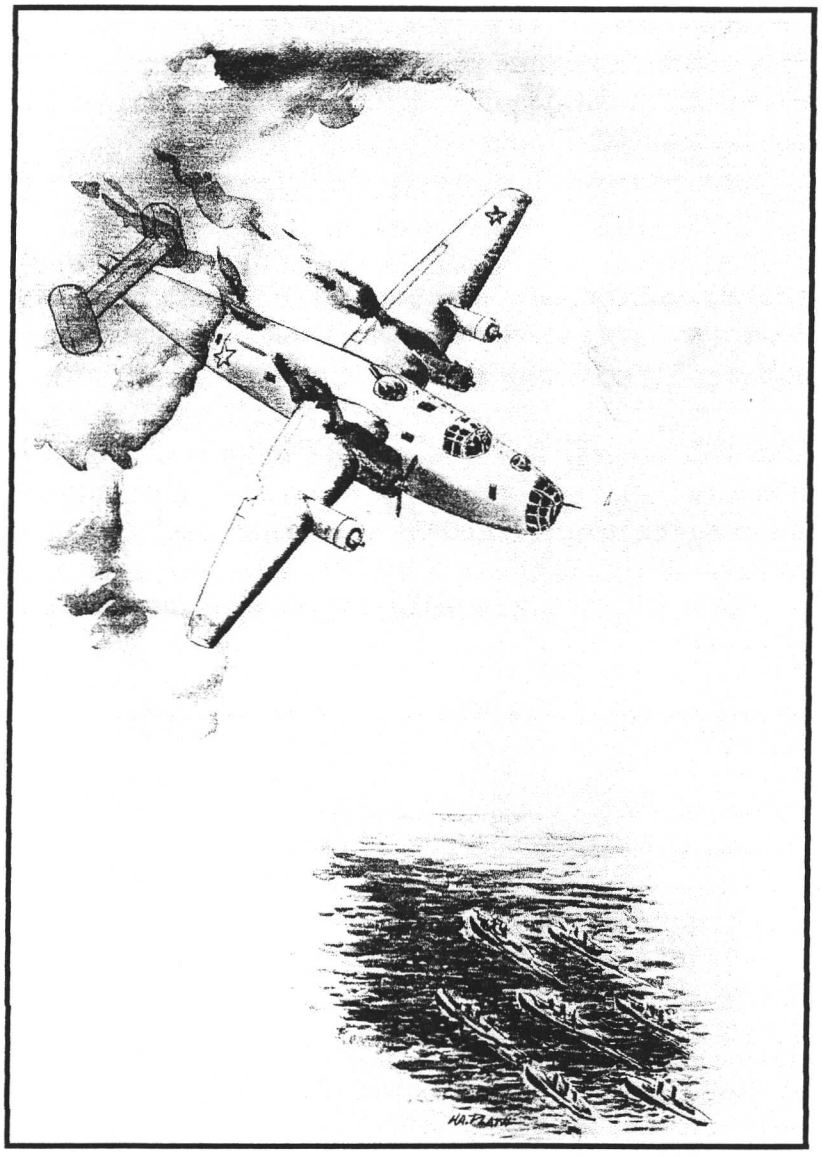
Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds ~ and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of ~ wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there
I've chased the shouting wind along and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.
Up, up the long delirious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,
Where never lark, or eagle, flew;
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

Somewhere in New Guinea on a January morning, 1943, our crew arose from a warm bed to the slight damp chill of a tropical morning. "Little Eva", our plane, was all warmed up when we reached the line and we prepared for immediate takeoff. I glanced at the glistening bombs in their bays by the eerie light of a dim flashlight. As I climbed onto the catwalk I thought ...."These babies are going to cause plenty of trouble when we find our target." Little did I realize how true these words would be; only in a far different sense.

We circled east of Salamaua a few minutes until dawn, then let down through the low clouds, heading for sea. "No convoy here." So, we set out on our prearranged search plan. About 9:45 the radio operator intercepted the message of another searching plane that had sighted the convoy. He gave the coordinates given in the message to the navigator, who in turn figured out the heading which would take us there, and gave the pilot his findings.

The clouds hung low with frequent cumulus rising to fourteen or fifteen thousand feet. Our E.T.A was almost up when the bombardier called, "Convoy two o'clock below." There they were with a great big transport in the center. "What a target!" We were too close so had to turn back and go south a few miles so as to make a run between two clouds for complete visibility. The convoy was in a hard spot to hit, but this position would do it. No sooner were "Wings level...on course", then "Zeros, one o'clock above!" came over the interphone. There they were! "Here they come!" The nose and upper turret guns start pounding away. The nose gun gets sporadic then, stops..."Come on, fix that thing!" I'm checking the instruments over again when WHAM ! Blood spatters onto the instruments. I glance up, a large hole is in the windshield. The pilot has been hit and his head is gushing blood and bone. He jerks a thumb at me and I take over, peel off and head down into thick cloud cover. Soon the navigator yells in my ear, "Number three on fire!" I glance at it...it's breaking out into a roaring inferno. I shove the mixture control to the 'idle cutoff' and hit number three feathering switch as I turned my head and yelled to the upper turret gunner, who is now on the flight deck, "Cut gas three!" making a motion of cutting my throat and holding up three fingers. As he dives into the bomb-bay I notice the navigator has the radio operator's shirt torn off and is patching a gaping hole in his shoulder. Number three is still windmilling so I drag back its RPM and hit the switch again. It slows down to a stop but won't feather. I slide my seat back and pull number three CO_2 discharge. The fire rapidly goes out. We are now passing through a thin cloud then out into the open. I look back. Three of them are on our tail that I can see. I tip her over and dive into the nearest cloud. I get her wings level and someone is yelling "FIRE!" I glance over; it's the pilot; he's still slumped over but is holding up two fingers in a "V". I glance at the navigator. He nods vigorously pointing at number two engine. "Damn, two's on fire." It goes out when I yank its CO_2 for the navigator waves his hand palm down. "Hope no more fires break out." "Hope number two is okay." "Instruments read only number three out?" We break out of the cloud and we're right over the convoy so I haul her around back into the clouds. The clouds are plenty heavy now for us to get away so I level out. The right wing gets awfully heavy as we lose speed. In fact, it won't come up clear using complete controls full over and with trim tabs full set. I put the superchargers full on and pull the mixture controls into 'emergency rich', yet I can't maintain altitude. I now realize the instruments have <u>frozen</u>! "They must have gotten our electrical system!" "Water landing here we come!" The navigator rings the alarm. I call the bombardier, "Clear nose! Get medical kit. Salvo Bombs." He calls something I can't get, so I twice repeat: "Salvo Bombs! Clear nose! We're losing altitude fast now. When we reach 200 feet I reach over and pull the throttles back. I feel a hand and glance over; it's the pilot. He's sitting up and is going to help land. I nose her down and level out.

The right wing starts down. I hit number four feathering switch, she comes up a little. We hit once and skip. We hit again. I'm thrown into the instrument panel - stars, then blackness.

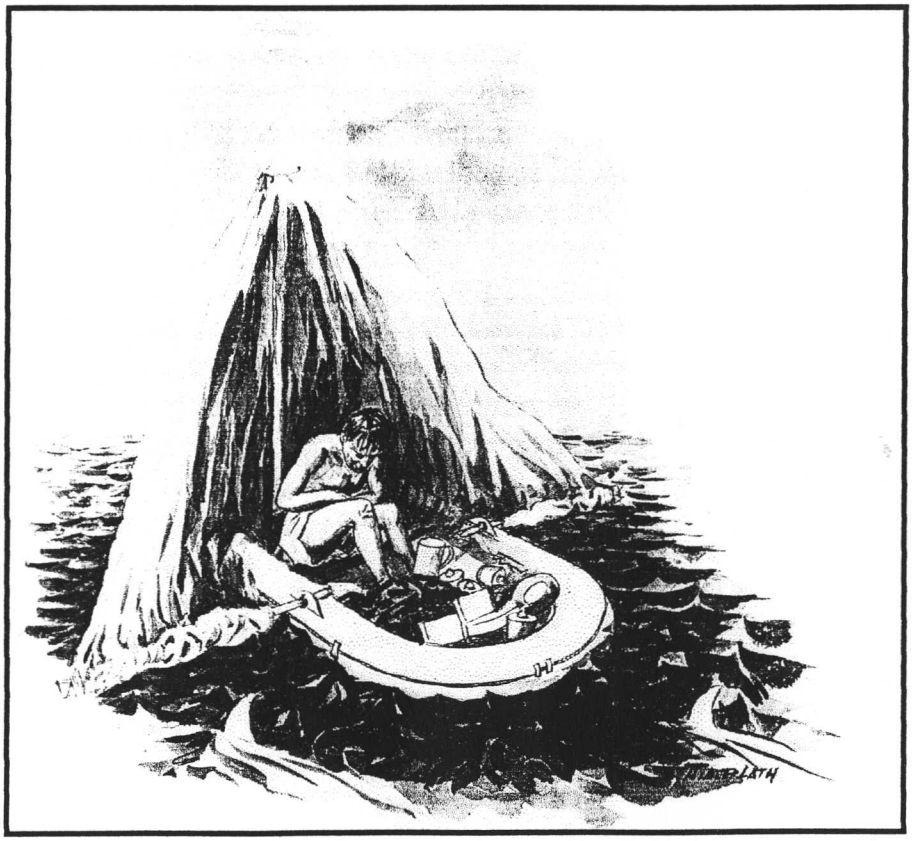


I come to; it's black dark, my ears hurt, and I hear only the gurgle of water as the ship fills with a rush. "The ship's sinking!" I lunge for the window then inward for the upper hatch. I'm pinned! Trapped! I'm quiet for an instant, then struggle upward to no avail, and then realize, "unsnap safety belt." I flip the catch and struggle for the side window. My feet are caught. I faintly remember sticking there, struggling half way out the window; then I'm free, but which way is up? I see a faint light and frantically crawl for it. I come busting up alongside a flaming hulk. "What's this?...What's happened?" It dawns on me I'm in the water and this is some part of the plane. "But where are the rafts?" I swim for the flaming hulk and find the life raft release handles. "They're wedged in!...got to get away...fire in the water." I swim away a few

yards and try to inflate my vest...cords are fouled...there...it fills with a rush of gas...that's better, now I can rest a moment. I open my eyes again and see a blotch of yellow...must be the raft...blindly I strike out. After an eternity I reach it...It's floating upside down. I'm trying to right it when I hear a plane. "Zero! damn, here he comes." We'll catch hell now...no, he doesn't see us; he's pulling back into the clouds..."What's happened to the plane?" It's gone...sunk." I finally get the bulky raft righted, haul my parachute aboard, and start rowing around to all the wreckage, looking for the others. I call out, only to hear the lapping waves and the throb of the convoy's engines. The superstructures of the convoy ships are still in sight but slowly disappearing over the horizon. Soon a B-24 drops below the clouds and passes about a mile to the east...I frantically dig out the flares but he's up and gone by the time I get one ready. I continue rowing around until late in the afternoon and slowly I realize ... "There are no others ... they're all gone ... and I am alone!"

I find three emergency ration kits floating, containing chocolate and biscuits, and also the tail turret cover and a strip of wood five or six feet long suitable for a mast. I strip the other raft of its equipment, consisting of: two oars, two 12 ounce bars of chocolates, six flares, first aid kit, and a repair patching kit.

Lashing the wood strip to an oar, I rig a mast on which I spread the parachute silk as a sail. Toward evening a breeze springs up and I set out on my long journey south. The wind grew cold in the night... my only company, a pale, heartless moon. This had been a horrible and historic day of my life, too gruesome to think of, I, at present, realized. Think of the present, the future, or home...not that...not now...later...later. Gradually I drifted off into a fitful nightmare of sleep.



Toward morning I slept soundly, for the sun was well up when I awoke. The air was still and I began to row southward. The faint coastline still hangs on the western horizon...Jap territory. About noon the drone of a plane reached me and I made out a B-17 in the distance. He would pass several miles to the south. When he was at the nearest point I began firing flares. He was too far away and did not see my signals and soon disappeared in the haze.

While I was still standing I noticed the other empty raft floating a few hundred yards away on which several gulls rested, but they were wary and as I approached they flew off. The coast line to the west was discouraging, as it appeared exactly as it had the day before in spite of continually making progress to the south all night. I did not know within fifty miles of where I was, and since I could not see land to the south, decided to change course to the nearest point west, which I figured was forty to sixty miles away. I could make that in a few days, if only I could get some water. This would be enemy territory, but I decided I would rather take my chances with the natives being friendly than to travel perhaps two hundred and fifty miles or more to friendly shores to the south. Also, there was still a chance of being sighted by friendly bombers out on search or patrol. Rain showers developed late in the afternoon and a breeze sprang up to the west, so I spread sail. I was unable to get under a rain shower until long after dark, when I collected perhaps half a cupful of water. Again it was cold and miserable this night, as it would be every night, I later found out. I would shiver and shake all night long, for the canvas turret cover and I were always wet with spray, though this would cut the wind a little. Luckily, I had no cold, and since there were not cold germs present, I could not catch pneumonia or even a cold.

In the mid-morning of the next day, again the drone of a plane reached my ears. I sighted him, a speck in the southern sky. His course brought him to within a half mile to the west of me, leaving him a brilliant sea for my background. Nevertheless, I fired several flares, most of which would fall back into the sea before its parachute would open. A cloud bank hung in front of him, and luckily he made a right turn which brought him within a quarter of a mile of me. Now he would stand a chance of seeing me, for in this position I would have the dark background of the clouds on which a flare would stand out. I again fired a red flare. It was beautiful! climbing high into the sky and blossoming out at the peak of its flight. Yes, he saw that one in spite of the poor visibility. He tipped her up and headed straight at me, pulling slightly to the left, skimming a few feet off the water.

I could barely make out two faces through the pilot's window, and as the waist window came into view the silhouette of three waving men stood out. As he passed, his four engines blew a light spray over me. He pulled her up, circling a couple of times, then made a run over me. I saw something splash in the water a few yards from me. I rowed over to it and found a canteen full of water wired to a "Mae West". I have never in my life tasted anything more delicious than that lukewarm water, for I had had but a few teaspoons full of water in the last twenty-four hours. He circled a few more times, then dropped two more canteens of water, a medical kit and four cans of ration C (hard candy, cookies, meat, vegetable hash, and cigarettes). I quickly opened two tins and drank another canteen of water after smoking a cigarette, which made me very dizzy. I fell asleep with him circling overhead. I was awakened by his buzzing me again just in time to see another life vest tumble into the sea. This one contained another canteen, three ration K units, a compass and a map. The map had my position marked with my drift for the last three hours and a note from the pilot. It told me that rescue was on its way and that he had been ordered to continue on with his mission. The pilot was from the same squadron as myself and a personal friend of mine and my crew. He thought he recognized me but would I signal when he flew across again. I wigwagged 'C P' for co-pilot as he approached. He pulled her up, dipped each wing once and then was on his way.

In the afternoon a pretty good breeze came up from the west, so I rigged the pilot parachute as a storm anchor, endeavoring to stay as close as possible to the same spot where I had been sighted. Late that afternoon I heard a plane approach from the north and pass several miles to the east on the other side of a cloud bank. It was almost dark when I heard another plane approach from the west and, thinking he would be Jap, I covered the raft with the gray canvas as he came into view. He turned several miles before he reached me and then I recognized his a B-24. Soon after I spotted two more B-24's, fifteen or twenty miles to the southwest, winding a search pattern. None of these sighted me. As darkness fell they turned back. My hopes were high for being sighted the following day since evidently they were searching for me. But the wind freshened, blowing me almost due east. The normal prevailing winds were to blow me towards the southeast; therefore, my easterly track took me out of the area they would most likely search.

The next day the clouds hung low, making it impossible for any chance of being sighted. About noon, a plane flying low passed almost over me, but I could not see him for the cloud cover. The next day I had but one and a half pints of water left, depending on rain. Soon I decided to ration it at a half a pint a day. The prevailing southeasterly winds sprang up this afternoon and I made slow progress along my course. My map showed me that I had approximately a hundred and fifty miles to go. My compass was rusting fast and even now was no longer dependable. I broke the glass, removed the needle and cleaned the pivot point, yet, due to pitting, it still had too much friction for a satisfactory reading. During the day I could tell my approximate course by the sun and my progress by watching occasional floating debris pass slowly by the boat. At night I would judge my course by the stars, mainly the big dipper, and my progress by the phosphorescent wake which trailed behind the raft.

The following day the clouds still hung low and no planes were heard nor seen. (I later learned they had given up the search the previous day when they had found the other life raft, which was empty; and so presumed I had been picked up by the enemy).

Several uneventful days passed. One morning an ache developed in the right hand side of my abdomen, steadily growing worse. I suspected it to be appendicitis and began cursing my luck. Late in that afternoon a similar ache developed on the other side, and I realized it was pain due to dehydration. Thus, I realized the pangs of thirst are not merely a desire for water, the leathery mouth, nor the dry gummy throat. They are real and severe pains. I was losing water quickly through perspiration, though I kept as cool as possible during the broiling days by covering myself with the silk and keeping that wet with sea water. This process was repeated continually during each day. I had a great longing to jump out by the raft in the clear cool sea, but refrained for fear of the ever circling and following tell-tale fins of sharks. The sharks followed constantly but attacked the raft only twice. Once they hit it at the stern, just enough to make the raft jump. The second time they dealt it a savage blow on the side. Neither time was there any damage caused, so they must have hit only with their noses and tails.

The clouds hung on the horizon for the next few days, and I was unable to locate myself. Each day the broiling sun beat down with still no sign of rain. My only company was the lapping waves whose sparkling tops transformed the sea into one brilliant glare. My eyes burned in their sockets like glowing coals, my lips split, and my face and hands peeled to raw meat. All these final days in the raft are blurred in my memory, and details I forget. I realized at the start that I could never bear the thinking of that hurtling comet I had ridden to the doom of my mates, who at this moment lie beneath the sparkling blue, merciless

and eternal lapping of the South Seas. I had now even greater difficulty driving these thoughts from my mind. "Later...later...not now." I would fill my mind with things at hand; of the clouds, the water, the fish, the occasional birds, of thoughts of home, and the boys in the squadron and of their trials. Contemplating what they were thinking and doing, and of others possibly in the same predicament as myself, and just what they were doing to wile away their time.

One morning I awoke and saw land nearby. I was too weak to row; and since a storm was overhead, blowing with a gale southward, I spread sail and set out for the coast which I knew lay in the wind's path. The center of the storm was east of me and the mast drew lightening. The pole would sing, beginning low at first, then rising to a scream. Lightning would flash perhaps a mile away and the shaft would be silent, only to break out again in its song. I soon went to sleep with the raft plowing over the now gigantic waves and did not awake until midday. The sky was now clear and the sea calm. In the far distance to the southwest I could make out a low, gray smoky mound which must be shore. At first I thought it was smoke as it was too low for clouds, but finally I decided it must be land. I feared I was being blown between New Guinea and the Solomons, since I was clearing this point by so far with no land in view to the south or southeast, so I managed the best I could to painfully sit up and begin rowing. The heat was intense and, as always, I would periodically pour sea water over my head. I continued rowing until long after dark. The moon rose early and I could still faintly discern the outline of the point. I saw something floating in the water near-by and decided to investigate. It turned out to be a ripe coconut. Shortly afterward, I found two more and hauled all three aboard. I immediately ate one. It was difficult at first to swallow, even slowly, but gradually I consumed the milk, then the meat of one. I kept a sharp eye out as I continued rowing and was later rewarded by finding one more. This one turned out to be rotten. The one gave me strength and I forced myself to row far into the night.

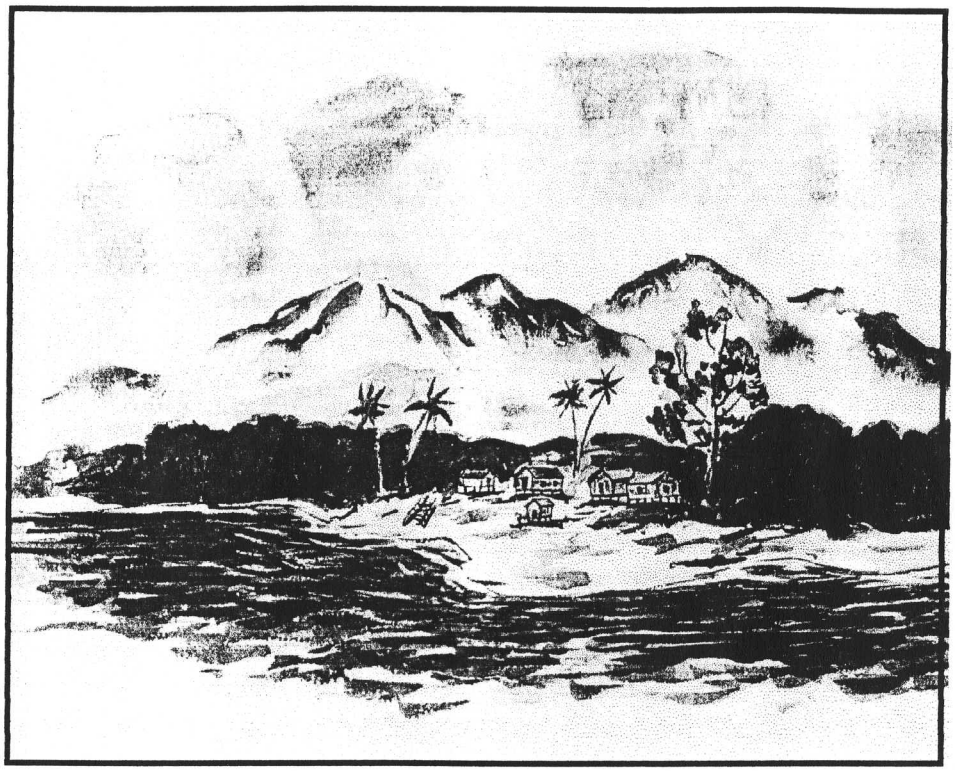
The next morning shortly after dawn I heard what I thought was a twin engine approaching. The drone grew louder yet no plane appeared. I stood up and saw a PT boat approaching from the west. He passed within several hundred yards of me without seeing me. I tried to fire my last remaining rocket but it was wet and useless. I continued rowing. During the night I had drifted to the west. I now had to row due south instead of southwest as I had the night before. About mid-morning I spotted a sail a few miles to the west. I could tell he was sailing almost toward me, as the sail grew larger as the day wore on and he did not change his relative position on the dim outline of the shore to the west. Early in the afternoon the breeze shifted to the south so I spread my sail and rested. In a few hours the breeze freshened and I began making good time. The sail had disappeared now - must have changed course - but later a plane flew high overhead which renewed my hopes. "If this wind holds I ought to make shore tonight, probably find friendly natives, then I ought to be able to signal a plane before too long."

A storm was developing over the point of land and at dark, just as I had only about another half mile to go, it broke in all its fury. A gale began to blow, blowing away from land and the swells soon developed into gigantic mountains of water. I removed the spread silk and threw the storm anchor over. The raft was lurching and jerking so that I was afraid to tie the anchor to the raft for fear it would be torn apart so I held the rope twisted around my arm. Soon it began to rain...rain as only it can in a tropical cloud burst. In the space of the few minutes the water poured down. I gathered enough to fill all four canteens and drink my fill. The wind continued until far into the night, and in the morning I found myself far out on a calm sea. I could make out the point I had been so near the night before, far to the south and slightly to the east, but to the south and southwest I could make out nearer points, even a faint coastline, so now I knew this <u>was</u>

the mainland of New Guinea. The nearest point was twenty or thirty miles, maybe more. I decided to head for this, not only because it was closer, but also more mountainous, thus more likely to have natives, as they build their villages near rivers as a general rule. I figured I could cover this distance in two days or less, but toward noon a breeze came up and I had to 'crab' quite a little to maintain my course, thus cutting down my speed. I was feeling better than I had in days and now had plenty of water and could really 'lay into the oars'. The breeze shifted in the early afternoon blowing me straight for a more distant point, so I changed my course. The raft was fairly skimming the waves for hours under full sail, and I knew that I would reach land that night. It was almost dark when the raft came into a lagoon between a small island and the mainland. The island was covered with dense coconut groves, so thinking natives possibly lived here; I made for it. I removed the sail and rowed to the island's sandy beach.

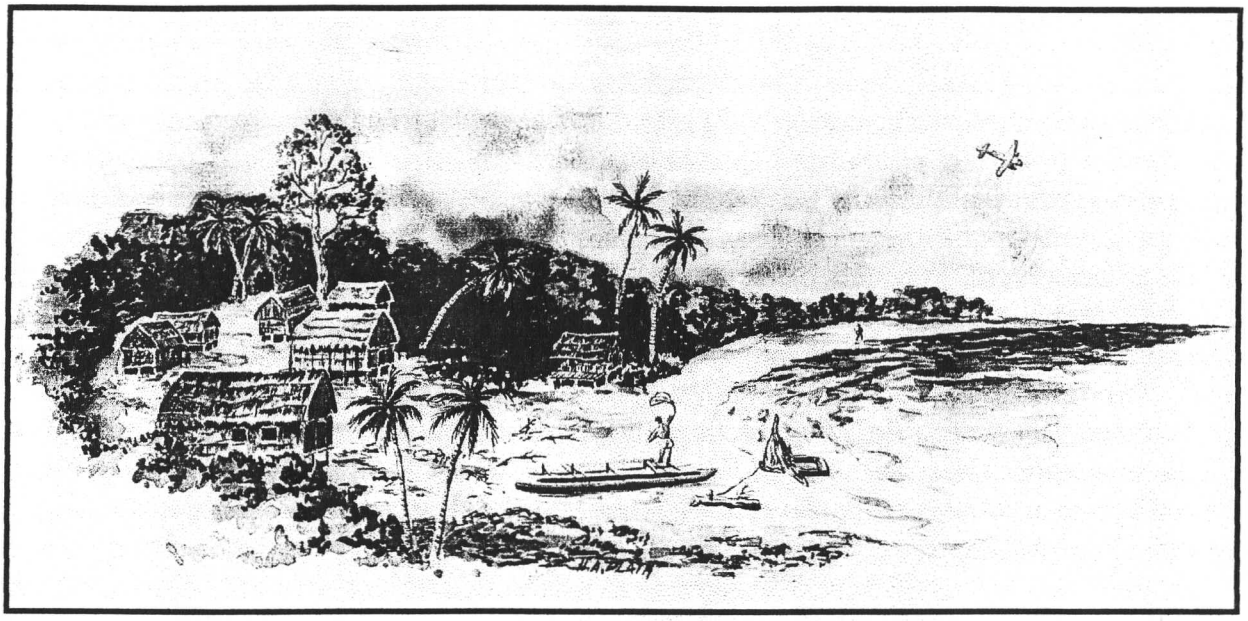
As the raft struck I bounded over the side to run into the coconut grove, but collapsed in a heap on my second step. My legs were partially paralyzed from not using them and keeping them in such a cramped position for so long. I crawled on up the beach, tied the mooring line to a tree and returned to the water. I stood in the water shoulder deep for awhile, then made several attempts to walk onto the beach, finally succeeding feebly. I walked into the grove and returned with several coconuts. I ate one, then dressed my wounds and lacerations, then rigged the battered parachute as a mosquito net over the raft and retired, as it was now dark. I slept fitfully; dreams and nightmares filled my sleep as they had for many nights. I woke up dozens of times during the night to reach over the side to bring back a fistful of sand, as I had so many nights before....after dreaming realistic dreams of striking land or of being rescued...to determine whether these things were true or not. I believe this, more than anything else, helped me to keep my sanity, as for many of the days I was out of sight of land and with no water. I was in a stupor and lived in a semi-dream world.

In the morning I was awakened by the squealing of pigs. There were dozens of pigs routing in the sand, pigs of all shapes, sizes and varieties. They were not in the least afraid of me; in fact, I soon had to drive them away with a stick for fear they would destroy the raft with their routing. I ate a breakfast of more coconuts, shredding the husks with pliers from the repair kit and drinking the milk by sucking on a hole punched through the "eyes", then breaking the nut open by sharp blows with the indispensable pliers. I had dropped my knife overboard the day before while tightening the sail's guy line, but the pliers had been of more use in opening the coconuts on the raft, anyway.

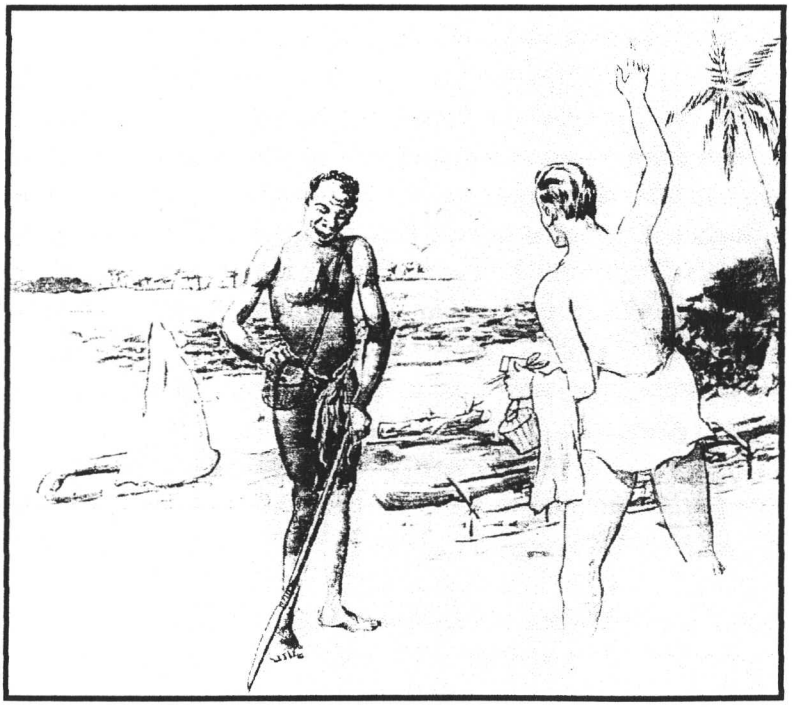


I then decided to row around the island in hopes of finding natives. I did not dare walk through the grove of trees, for the coconuts fell thick and fast at the slightest breath of breeze. I had rowed to the northern tip of the small island when I saw a native village over on the mainland about three-quarters of a mile away. This was just what I was looking for, so I turned the raft around, heading for the village. I landed on the black beach, ran the mooring line to a nearby fallen tree trunk, and walked into the village. The village seemed to be deserted so I called out and received no answer. The village was deserted and had been so for some time, so I judged by the looks of things. At the end of the village I found a semi-stagnant stream where I filled my canteens, adding sufficient iodine to render it disinfected.

I searched the houses, finding a few rusty knives and a worthless old hoe, a broken iron pot, and several large clay jars; also in one I found a witch doctor's feathers and hideously carved masks. I had walked down a trail several minutes looking for the garden I knew must be near when the drone of fast approaching planes reached my ears. I returned to the village as fast as possible and just in time to get a glimpse of several Aussie dive-bombers sweeping on down the beach. I noticed a house I had missed as I again started for the jungle and was searching it as more planes came roaring down the coast. This time I reached the beach in time for the last element to see me. They were A-20's this time. They pulled up and circled down again, peeling off and buzzing me individually. I was standing beside the raft now waving my shirt so there would be no doubt in their minds as to my color. Now surely rescue was close at hand; they will report my location and soon rescue will arrive. As I was watching one round the bend I noticed something moving down the beach. When the planes had gone I focused my attention on this object. "It's a man: A black man walking down the beach and heading this way." When he got within earshot I called to him and he hastened his steps.



The native approached me in a friendly manner, and when I extended my hand he accepted it in handshake. I told him I was an American soldier who came from the sea and wanted to be taken to white men. He stood there with a puzzled look on his face, so I simplified my words and talked slowly. I don't know how much of the story he understood, but later natives asked me questions which proved he had told them something of what I had told him.



I led him to the large beached war canoe on which I had my stuff spread to dry and proceeded to give him everything I could spare, which he could possibly use, and this included two fish hooks and a line, a pair of scissors, a pair of pliers, two bars of chocolate and a canteen. He was very pleased when I gave him this and a large smile spread over his face exposing a good set of teeth which were all jet black. I asked him, "Buna 'e stop long where?" and swept my arm through a 180 degree arc from up the coast to down the coast and repeated, "Buna." He pointed down the coast saying, "Buna go, go, go." I then asked him, "Master 'e stop long here?" "Three master 'e stop long mission," holding up three fingers and pointing up the coast. I asked him how many days pointing at the sun and sweeping my arm through the sky on the path the sun follows, then held up one, then two, then three, four and five fingers. In response he said, "Walk long road four, five hours." This I interpreted to mean four or five days, so turned my attention on Buna again. "Bring 'em master long Buna, Master give 'em good-fellow pay." He shook his head and said he would return to his village which was inland several day's walk. "Garden 'e stop long 'ere?" ""E stop" and pointed inland. We then walked toward the village. As we came opposite one building he stopped, saying "Bad 'ere. Two mary bugger up finish (die) 'ere." I figured two women must have died, so grunted and continued walking. He ran ahead of me and stopped beside a tree, pointing to several holes in the trunk. They were obviously made by bullets. Some had gone through the tree and lodged in a fallen tree behind. The angle showed that they had been shot from pretty high up strafing. As I was examining these he said, "Barlus shoot 'em up. Two mary bugger up finish." We continued down the track and soon came to a burial ground. Two fresh cut wooden crosses stood out, at which he pointed. Evidently two native women had been machine-gunned to death a few weeks before by strafing airplanes and were buried here. Thus the villagers were afraid it would happen again, and so had left. This would account for the village being deserted.

We continued on a few yards and then left the track and came into a clearing which was a native garden. He began to dig potatoes in the soft ground, starting from the side and digging under the plant without digging the plant up. He found a few tubers which resembled yams, then finding no more we returned to the village. He then insisted on going on up the track for more food, leaving me behind. After walking a few yards he retraced his steps and laid all of his possessions in front of me, saying words to the effect that if he left this here I would then know that he would return. He was gone a good hour during which time I finished off the yams, then turned to study his belongings. His spear was an old knife blade lashed to a shaft of hardwood about three feet long, a sturdy, versatile implement and weapon. Beside the spear lay a small, well-worn leather pouch with a shoulder strap attached for carrying. The pouch contained several rusty tobacco cans filled with a wide assortment of stones, shells, and an old rusty key. In the bottom I found several nuts about the size of an elongated walnut. The shell was a hard green husk containing a kernel similar to that of an almond. With these nuts was a gourd filled with a gray powder-baked and crumbled clam shells; crude lime in other words. Later I learned practically all of the natives above the age of fourteen or fifteen carried this; their beetle-nut paraphernalia. They peel the husk with their teeth and chew the kernel, adding lime from time to time. Gradually the mixture turns a blood red, and after chewing for perhaps a half hour or more, they spit it out. This leaves a slime coating in their mouth which they swallow. This slime contains a narcotic which, in excess, produces a stupor similar to that of alcoholic drunkenness.

Shortly after I had finished examining his belongings, the native appeared bringing oranges, pineapples and more yams. After eating and lounging around for perhaps an hour, during which time I continued questioning, I learned he actually understood time of day. He said it was now about one o'clock and we

could reach the white men before dark. I felt weak, yet thought that I could make it. So after gathering up my canteens and medical kit (during my questioning I had asked him if white men were also wounded, thinking perhaps that they were the remnants of a patrol party, pointing to my wounds and lacerations. He didn't understand me very well, I later found, for he said, "All same.") We set out and my legs soon began to wobble - after a bit I was remaining on my feet only by will power, yet my knees finally gave way and I crumpled and sprawled headlong on the track. I called out to the native who immediately returned to my side. He did everything within his power to make me comfortable in a worried and sympathetic manner. My legs were weak and trembled though I massaged them. I seemed to have little control over them at first; gradually strength returned and I could stand; an exasperating situation, to say the least, when your body no longer responds to your will. I felt faint and nauseated so decided to return to the village rather than to continue, for at this rate we would never walk a normal four or five hours walk before dark. We arrived at the village just as the sun was setting, though I had not over three-quarters of a mile to retrace. We rigged the parachute as a mosquito net and I retired shortly after eating. At dusk I noticed the native gather up his belongings and head for the beach. At the end of perhaps twenty minutes I decided to go down and watch him fish, but he had disappeared. I walked up the beach a short distance, but darkness fell as his footprints left the beach heading into the jungle. I returned with misgivings as to his intentions, yet perhaps he would return in the morning to lead me into the mission.

The next morning I awoke to see three natives squatting around a fire under the house across the path. They heard my movement and got up and walked toward me, each with a spear or knife in his hand. The one in the lead was older than the others and wore a blue felt garrison hat with a broad red band around the crown. They stopped a few feet from me, intently watching me. I didn't know what course of action to take but decided to take their intentions as friendly. "Master come long sola water, Japan 'e shoot 'em up." The natives grinned and nodded their heads and talked a short time, then they were silent. The older man offered, "Me luluai Kobo. Japan 'im one big bastard!" (Might just as well quote what he actually said.)

This cast all doubt from my mind as to their intentions so I questioned them as to the presence of white men in the vicinity. "Three master 'e stop long mission," replied the luluai (pronounced Lulu a), pointing up the track I had walked the day before. "You walk along mission with me?" pointing to myself then to him. "We go," he replied. "How many hour long mission?" I queried. "Close up, three, four hour." he responded. We walked over to the fire and the chief dug a baked yam from the coals, offering it to me. I gratefully accepted it and broke it open to cool. After eating I once again gathered up my equipment and prepared to leave, but as we set out, the two native boys insisted on carrying my stuff. The chief walked ahead, swinging he spear from side to side, knocking the excess dew from the waist-high grass. It was cool there, walking on the padded track under over-hanging foliage. The jungle was alive with the singing of insects and calling of birds. After walking for perhaps an hour and a half, we came into a clearing choked with taro stalks, paw paw trees, green corn, pineapples, and melons. This was indeed a well-tended garden as compared with the first I'd seen, for the first was already half taken over by the jungle. The chief called out several times to finally be answered by a woman's voice deep in the garden. They called back and forth, then a smile broke on the chief's face; he was well pleased with something. Further on I asked the old man to pick a melon, and soon he stepped off the track a few feet and threw some leaves aside and exposed a large, half-ripe watermelon, which he cut and brought back. We sat down along side the track and all fell to eating it. We finished off a little over half and the chief picking up the rest moved on down the trail. Passing through a choked forest of tall, slender trees, I noticed a small clearing littered with fallen trees and vines. This would soon be made into a garden. The long straight trees had been cut, stripped and lay in

piles, standing end up against trees to dry. Soon the trail dropped down on the beach edge, the track dropping into the sand when confronted with tangled masses of trees and vines. The trail had run along the sand for quite a little way when a clearing opened, exposing a large dugout set high on the beach. The boat was fifteen or twenty feet long with a platform built in the middle and a large out-rigger running out to the starboard. Behind the lack-a-tory (canoe) lay a tangled, jungled swamp. A young boy emerged from nowhere, walked to the chief, and extended his arms to take the melon he carried.

We walked on, and soon the track left the beach hitting, inland for a distance to the village of Kobo. Kobo is very similar to Waitade, though it was not on the beach. Several young, rough-looking natives stood about the largest building which we approached. The chief sat down on the porch and I followed suit, the natives crowding around, cooing and clucking as one pointed at my cuts. They spoke little, and presently the chief offered me some native tobacco. It had a delightful aroma but was too strong. After a few minutes rest, the chief told me to go on with the two boys and he would join us at the river with his lack-a-tory (war canoe). The trail was clear of grass now, and the ground being wet was very muddy and slippery. We came upon a deserted village about half a mile down the track; one building was studded with crosses and had bright colored grass hung from the eaves and was surrounded by a low broken-down fence.

Further down the track we came upon several youngsters playing in the mud; they evaporated into the jungle as they caught sight of us, and the lead boy called to them. The boy thought this was very funny and continued yelling and laughing for several minutes. Finally we came to the bank of a wide jungle river. A shelter and bench were erected, where we waited for the old man. Three deep cuts, about three feet wide and ten or twelve feet long, had been carved into the bank where the natives could moor their dugouts.

Presently two old marys (women) came up the track carrying crescent shaped nets in which they would carry fruits and vegetables, gathered in the garden up the river. One mary carried a small child a-straddle her neck, holding him in place by one hand.

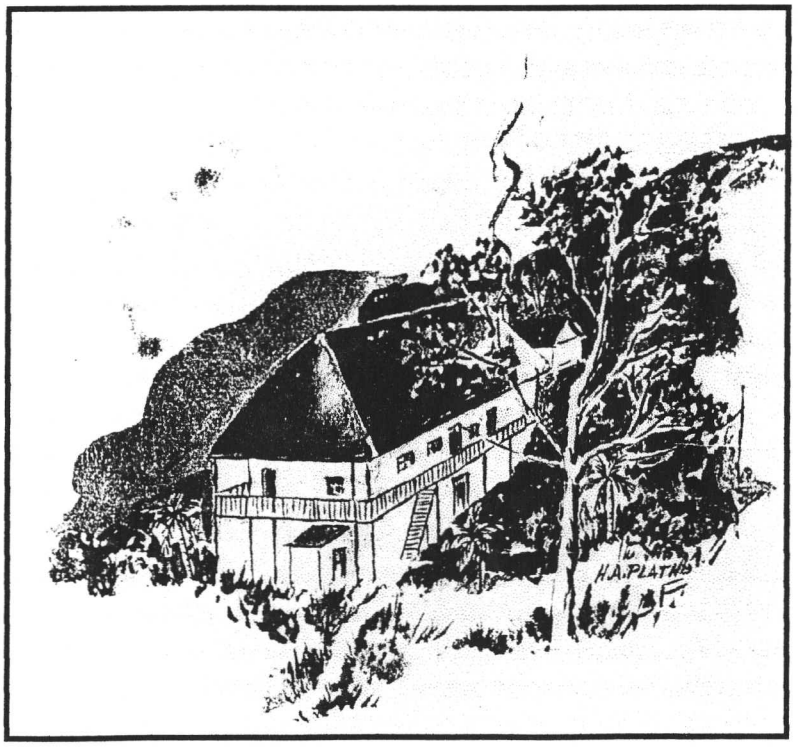
The old chief finally arrived and exhibited a string of small fish. I remember this for they had transparent tails and translucent bodies with the bones showing through. I boarded the dugout and we set out across stream with two small boys paddling and then poling. During the crossing the chief offered me another variety of black leaf tobacco which I learned was trade tobacco from the white men. This was better than the other but still too strong for me. The chief carried his ever-present fire stick which always smoldered so fire was no problem, for the tobacco would stay lit only a minute at a time.

Presently, we pulled up on the opposite bank; and leaving the two small boys to tie up we struck out into the dense, tall grass. There was a trail, but I had to just follow the chief for the grass filled the passage obscuring the path. We came out, finally, onto a broad track which wound up the hillside - it was drained on the upper side and had been dug into the bank. I asked the chief, "Kanaka (native men) build road?", pointing to the track. "German build 'em road long time. German good fellow." I started to tell him that the Germans were bad, but decided that it would be useless when he added, "German Mission." The road had not been repaired for a long time, yet the natives had kept the jungle back. The road wound up, opening into a small deserted village. I thought we had arrived, but the chief continued on and presently turned off up a hill. Visibility had been so limited I thought we were on top but soon realized we were just getting started, as I looked up the open ridge. We struggled on; the track was even steeper. Finally the chief pulled up under the shade of a tree to rest. After five or ten minutes we heard voices and the two boys.

They appeared bearing the other half of the watermelon we had eaten earlier in the morning, and three half-green pineapples. We consumed the melon and shortly after toiled on, up, up.

Another half hour brought us on top and there stood a very dilapidated old mission. We continued on, coming into another group of houses and a large white red-roofed building, studded with a cross on either end of the gable. "New mission," declared the luluai. The chief walked on, coming to a wide path which rose, then fell, exposing a large white building, settling on the side of a hill, the building being surrounded on three sides by a wide verandah. The chief approached the stairs under the verandah and waited for me to ascend first. I climbed up, coming out onto the verandah and heard a radio playing with much static. I walked toward the door and saw through the window three rugged "Aussies". They arose, opened the door, and greeted me. I gave them my name and organization and in turn was introduced to Frank, Claude, and Jock of the Australian Imperial Forces. I offered my only identification, and Ever-sharp pen with my name engraved thereon. They began to pry me with questions, offering me a chair and ordering loudly, "Cookie, bring em Kie Kie (food) and tea." I explained my situation in few words and silence ensued.

Presently a native appeared bearing steaming rice and powdered milk, yams and tea. I fell to eating but filled up after a few bites and had to stop, though I still had a tremendous appetite, for I had eaten very little in the past two weeks. I had lost 25 to 30 pounds, I judged, and my new-found friends didn't think I would weigh over 130 pounds, which is 30 to 35 pounds underweight for me. Nevertheless I was ready to eat again at dusk and did myself justice. When I had finished eating, Frank asked me how far the chief had brought me. When I told him six or seven hours or perhaps five miles, he gave the old man two sticks of trade tobacco. I thought this was a very small reward, but the chief seemed to be well pleased. I later learned the native wage was one stick of hard pressed black trade tobacco a day and it is valued at six pence (8 cents). The chief made off presently after trading the three pineapples for two more sticks of tobacco.



The mission commanded a wonderful view, set here as on a high island in the midst of jungle, with the river below winding itself up into the blue green Owen Stanleys and the slate ocean merging into the cloud at the horizon. Here I could rest until a flying boat would land in the lagoon and fly me home to my base.

The AIF soldiers had come to this lonely spot as aircraft spotters. The mission had been strafed a few weeks before with numerous holes in the North side and silhouettes on the South wall where sharp nosed bullets had ricocheted through. This had killed one police boy and wounded another. Only the roof over the verandah had been penetrated; thus the rooms were dry during the frequent heavy rains. In the afternoon we dispatched a message to my headquarters, notifying them of my arrival at this station, giving them complete details and identification. I rigged the parachute as a mosquito net and retired soon after dark. In the morning, I told them of the pigs and wild fowl I had seen on the island. Frank and Claude decided to go down the next day hunting, but after a short time they decided to go out that day. They set out about nine or ten o'clock and returned in the late afternoon with natives carrying two pigs and my raft. The pigs had been dead and had been in the sun too long and were spoiled, yet the natives gladly accepted them when we no longer wanted them. How lucky we were they decided to go that day instead of the next, as they had planned, for during the night four Jap landing barges had pulled in at the mouth of the river. We arose that morning, looking about the serene landscape and prepared for another day. About eleven o'clock a police boy, who had been sent down to a nearby village, returned bearing a Jap cigarette package a native had given him, and simply stated, "Japan man stop long mouth Waria." He did not know how many, only that they came by boat. He asked for more ammunition saying, "Me shoot 'em up finish." Claude gave him several rounds with instructions to kill if there was one, but if there were two or more he was to return and give us their number and position.

We speculated as to what Japs would be doing in this area and agreed they must be renegades escaped from Buna. Probably only a few, half starved, ill-equipped, Japs who could be done in easily enough, but we removed all visible signs of habitation from the lines around the priest's home and kept an eye peeled to prevent any ambush, in case they saw us and felt like coming up here. About twelve o'clock the Kobo Luluai came up and told us the Japs were in his garden. We asked him how many there were of them but he had no idea. He said they came in boats, and when we asked how big the boats were, he walked from one end of the building to the other and held his arm out horizontally, then held up four fingers saying, "Four boats stop long waria." He then pointed to the river bank. Frank made out two long dark lines just above the water. On examining them with glasses, he located four large landing barges covered with foliage. Soon, several Japs emerged from the jungle and began unloading cargo. Well! this put a different light on the whole thing, for here we were, four white men armed only with single-action rifles, against two or three hundred Jap commandos with full fighting equipment. We dispatched the Luluai to secure kanakas (native men) for carriers, then to return to his garden, find out their movements, and report back to us the next day. We then began packing the equipment and preparing to leave. About four or four-thirty the kanakas arrived, loaded, and set out down the back trail. While we were packing, Jock, still half-dead with his latest attack of malaria, insisted on going down and sneak on the Japs to try and find out why they had come, and to see what they had in the way of equipment. Frank was young and impetuous so jumped at the chance to see some excitement. Claude was the ranking non-commander, and decided they could go, with the provision that Jock was to say what goes. (Jock had fought in Greece, Africa, and the Middle East for two and a half years and so ought to be able to hold his head in any emergency.) They were to meet us at a certain village up stream, no later than dawn the next day. So we bid them good-bye and set out following the natives down the hill.

We walked for several hours, finally arriving at the designated village, long after dark. We set up bunks for the four of us, then walked over to the house "Cookie" was in. He prepared tea for us, then built a smoky fire to ward off the 'eager' mossies (mosquitoes). We had finished the tea and were rolling a smoke when the throb of engines reached our ears. The drone gradually grew louder then, when they sounded near, throttled down. We suspected the Japs of guessing our position and were landing troops just below us, so we wasted not time posting guards. A little later a plane approached from the sea, desynchronized his engines, circled in the vicinity of the river's mouth, then headed up stream flying low, passing almost directly over us. He continued up stream a few minutes, circling once, then we heard the report of exploding bombs. The Japs must have figured we would be stupid enough to build an open fire,, which they could bomb. The night was black so their only hope of hitting us would be by bombing a fire we might build. The next day we learned the natives up stream had had a fire through which the bombs had fallen. Shortly after the plane left, a guard warned us of the approach of someone, and we prepared to give them a warm reception. Soon we heard low voices in English, and Frank and Jock appeared. They had been sighted and chased, but not before they had learned what they had set out for.

In a few hours dawn came, and we tramped on to another village where we thought we'd be safe for a few days at least. We then set the natives to work building a hideaway high on the side of the mountain. We spent a week here during which time we dispatched daily messages as to the movements of the enemy, gathered by a reliable native who was allowed free access to the garden on which the Japs camped. One former Rabaul police boy who had escaped from a Jap labor battalion at Buna along with dozens of others when the going got rough there, sketched us an accurate map of the region with the Jap's positions and equipment caches. It was so complete, he even had the guards number and location marked. They now occupied the Mission, (Jock continually cursed our luck, not having had some booby traps to set in the mission when we left.) They also occupied Kobo, Waitade,' where I first landed, and in the last few days the village where we had stayed the night of the bombing.

The chief of this village, fearing the Japs would get hold of his property evacuated first his women, then each day as the patrols came nearer, began to evacuate his precious pigs. You would hear a terrible commotion in the bush, then you'd see a native drag a squealing, struggling pig out, lash its feet together, place a pole through, and with the help of another native, they would cart him down to the boat and carry the loudly protesting pig across the river.

About five days after we arrived, Frank and I set out into the mountains. I realized that the Japs might be here indefinitely, so had decided to hike back to an air-strip the "diggers" had told me of. Frank was willing to walk part way to be sure I found the right trail. This turned out to be a false start, for when we reached the village which had been bombed, we could not find any natives to carry our gear, and the natives we had disappeared on the prospect of having to carry further. One native stayed with us, though, and he paddled us down the treacherous river to camp.

Two days later I was again preparing to travel, and shortly before I was ready, the village chief came up to tell us a patrol had run onto our footprints in the mud this side of a village down stream and were now at the creek a few hundred yards down stream heading this way. I asked the spotters what they planned to do and, when they showed indecision, I grabbed two native carriers and headed out. After walking several hours, I was letting down over a hill, and when rounding a bend I saw three heavily armed natives down the

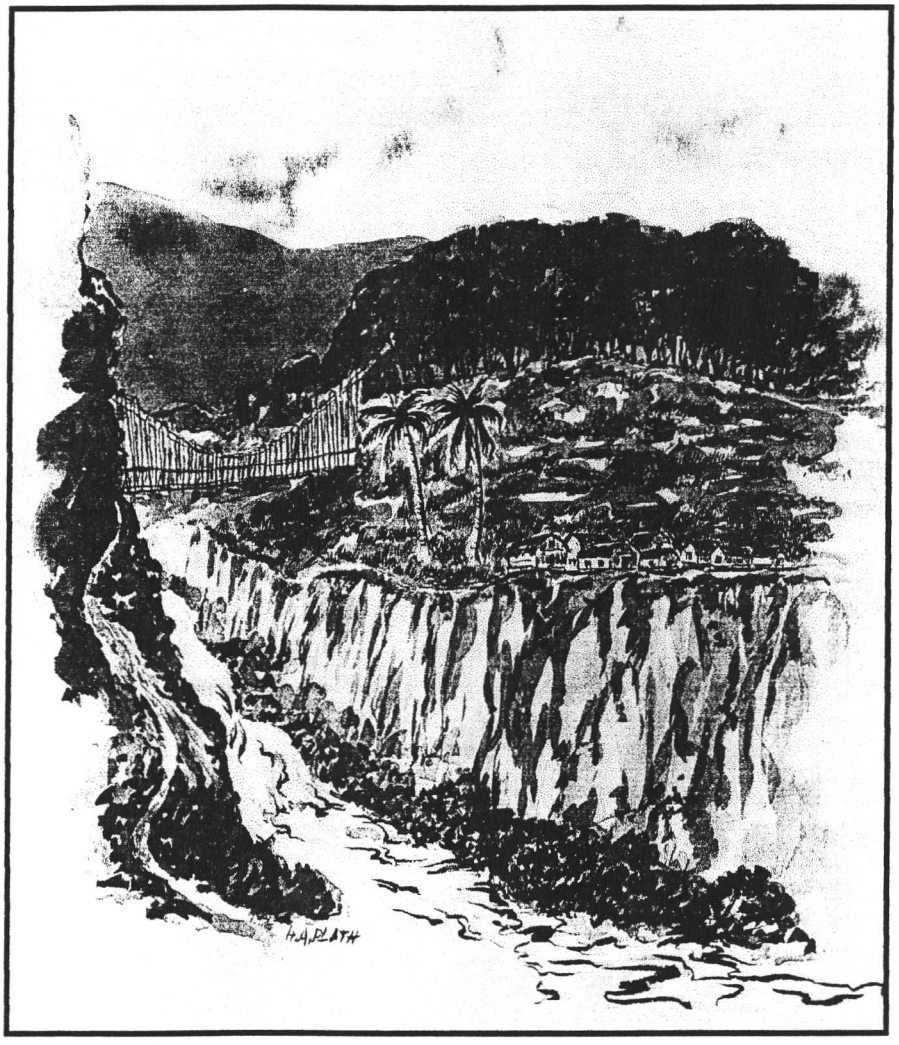
track jump into the jungle. The natives behind me called out, to be answered by a voice in the jungle, and soon a white man appeared. He introduced himself as Lt. Bridge of the A.I.F. He had received orders to come in and have me carried out, as they had the impression at headquarters that I was unable to walk. I explained the situation with the spotters down below and that I thought I was now strong enough to make it under my own steam. He told me to go to a certain village where his camp was, and wait for a day until he returned when he would outfit me for the journey. He told me the track would be rough most of the way, but it was cooler further up and the valleys and rivers would be beautiful.

I pulled into the camp just before dark and was greeted by the sergeant. He had a complete medical kit, so I coated my festering cuts with sulfa drugs. The next afternoon the lieutenant returned telling us that the spotters had decided to come back this way and were now at the village just below. If the Japs came this wa,y they would warn us, and they would alternately play rear guard action for the other while I should clear out now. That night he received information that there were about 750 Japs escaped from Buna, heading this way on the inland trail which passed within a few miles of here. They would probably cut down stream, passing through this village on their way to join their comrades at the river's mouth. Thus, we would have to get out in a few days before they reached here. (The Japs never got that far. for our troops caught up with them, and did them in, two or three days later.)

The next morning as I was preparing to leave, a group of natives reported in to the lieutenant, the movements of the Japs. One, a doctor boy, had been caught and questioned as to our position. When he told them he didn't know, they threatened him with a knife, but he had broken free and escaped without telling them a thing. The others were guards and spies who reported movements. An hour or so after dawn, I set out with a police boy named Livingston, a cook boy, and extra equipment which were compliments of the lieutenant. The trail now ran high on the ridge under high trees. Numerous creeks cascaded down, spanned by long felled tree trunks. Midday brought us to another village where we ate. Livingston was cleaning his gun after dinner and broke his pull-through, leaving a large patch stuck half way down the barrel. I gave him orders not to fire it until we could remove it later on. We had crossed the river on the inland route about half an hour back and were dragging up the hill when I heard a shot ring out far behind me. We stopped and I sent a native back to bring Livingston up and ask him what had happened. I waited for a few minutes and he didn't show. Livingston usually followed but a few yards behind, and I began to wonder if maybe the Japs had arrived earlier than expected and taken a shot at him. The natives were getting restless and I was getting nervous when Livingston finally walked up with a sheepish grin. He had forgotten about not firing his rifle and stalked a bird. For some strange reason the barrel had not split and was now clean as a pin, so he paid little attention to my lecture. Late in the afternoon we arrived in a village where we camped for the night. The cook prepared a hot dinner of ration "C", yams and tea. After dark, I craved companionship so went down to Livingston's quarters to talk, but he was tired and soon fell asleep. I returned to my hut and tried to throw off my fear of being alone. I had a fear of being alone with only my thoughts for company - this fear was to remain with me for several weeks, I later found out. So long as someone was near, I was all right; but as soon as I was alone, I became nervous.

Early the next morning we set out and after a hard day's walk we arrived at another spotting station late in the afternoon. We had been creeping along a shale mountainside, and when rounding a bend I glimpsed a huge suspension bridge hung between two hills, high over a roaring cataract. Another hour's walk brought us to this bridge which was fifty or sixty yards long, spanning a rushing, roaring river many feet below. The bridge was an engineering marvel in my estimation, although further up I later crossed numerous such bridges; but this was the most spectacular. It was woven of thick vines anchored to numerous

trees high on either side of the catenary drooping a hundred feet or more. The walwas was of two continuous poles for the catwalk and a vine railing at about waist height. The thing would get to swinging unless you walked irregularly, which I had no difficulty doing, and never more the two men ventured on to it at a time. I had planned to stay here two days, but on the second day I came down with a fever.



The third day we received a message to be delivered immediately to a point several day's walk away. Zikee, one of the police boys, had disobeyed orders awhile back, so he was designated to carry this message. It was about eight thirty p.m. when he left. The next day Jim came in saying he had seen Zikee about an hour's walk away from the station, at about nine o'clock that morning. Well, they threatened practically annihilation of Zikee when he returned, for fooling around all night. Forty-eight hours after he had left the camp, Zikee returned with a coded acknowledgment of message received. Zikee had covered four full day's normal walk in an actual point to point time, in less that thirty-six hours. A truly unbelievable feat. He was more dead than alive and was still in bed two days later when I left.

Jim had agreed to walk to the airstrip with me, and we set out early one morning. The trail lead over very rough mountainous terrain. We would crawl, pull, and gradually creep to the top of a hill only to skid, slip, and slide down the other side. We left the river and crossed several large streams which were spanned by native suspension bridges. Four weary days of travel brought us to our destination. We waited an additional five days before my plane came overhead. It took several hours, from where we made camp, to walk down to the landing strip in the valley.

The A.I.F. pilot was glad to see me, but impatient to get off again, as the plane was unarmed and an old Australian twin-engined advanced trainer. Soon we were circling high into the air out of this hidden valley, gaining altitude into the cold blue sky in order to clear the high, snow-capped peaks of the Owen Stanley Range.

This was the middle of February and thirty-seven days since that fearful crash in which my plane and crew were lost.